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ABSTRACT

The author briefly examines how educational reform attempts in Cuba since 1959 have taken place and how they have been related to social, economic, and political change efforts in the society at large. The Cuban educational system makes a significant contrast against the failure which characterizes the other Latin American educational systems. Cuban efforts have made important strides toward creating a new socialist man upon whose deeds and accomplishments Castro's Marxist society can rest. On taking power, Castro instructed all Cubans on how inequities and inefficiencies in the educational system reflected the consequences of economic and cultural domination. Education has been selected to serve as the instrument of individual and social change. Both the formal school system and the out-of-school educational sector have been vastly expanded and reoriented. In the formal school system, elimination of private schools after 1961, increased budgetary inputs, community pressure, and vigorous enforcement of extended attendance requirements have all contributed to skyrocketing public school enrollment figures. Revolutionary Cuba has, for the first time in Latin America, created a social context where aspirations of educational reform have been brought into harmony with work opportunities and national development goals. It remains to be seen whether other Latin American countries will be able to draw from this experience. (Author/DB)

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Revolutionary Educational Reform Efforts in Latin America

If one takes an overview of Latin American educational systems during the past decade or so, a number of continuing problems become clearly apparent. For one, the educational sector, with explosive expansion to meet growing social demand for schooling, has consumed a staggering percentage of national budgets, a situation that has frequently led to the neglect of related social sectors such as public health, housing, and the like.

A second critical problem is the extremely low retention power, or internal efficiency, of Latin American educational systems. That is to say, most students fail to complete primary schooling. In 1957, for example, 41 per cent of all primary school enrollment was concentrated in the first grade and 7 per cent in the highest primary grade; in 1965 the percentages were 38 per cent and 8 per cent, with only slight improvement today. This situation means that those few who graduate are produced at enormous cost, while the vast majority of students learn only the rudiments of literacy and numeracy.

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The third problem concerns what is learned in school, i.e., how school-acquired and/or reinforced behaviors, attitudes, and skills link up with national development plans and aspirations. Here the educational reformers face, perhaps, the most enduring and tenacious problem of all: how can schools that have traditionally functioned—and with great success—essentially as instruments for acculturation and the legitimization of Hispanic cultural dominance be reoriented to serve the difficult processes of technological modernization and societal development?

Beginning in the early 1960s, the U.S., through the AID, the Peace Corps, the military, and other technical assistance missions, sought to encourage and support the reorientation of Latin American educational systems. International organizations such as UNESCO and ILO and large foundations (Ford, Rockefeller, et al.), along with numerous U.S. universities, addressed the same set of problems. These efforts worked variously to provide educational facilities which would reduce unit costs and make schooling more internally efficient by reducing waste and increasing completion rates, and perhaps most importantly, to relate reformed educational programs to ongoing and proposed economic development plans. In education as in other social sectors, models and standards from the U.S. and Western Europe—i.e., from advanced urban and technological societies—were naively superimposed on rigidly-stratified and largely rural Latin American societies with entrenched educational traditions focused on the granting of academic professional titles and the cultural symbols considered appropriate for elites already determined by family membership.

Results of this multinational educational intervention in Latin American development have, to say the least, not been as expected. Rather than the hoped-for incremental improvements in production, consumption, and participation, we have seen the rise to power of military dictatorships in what was a continent where at least quasi-democratic states predominated. The consequences of this development for educational reform have in most cases been increased inequity in educational opportunity, and accordingly, increased inequity in life chances for the vast majority of children.

In sum, attempts at incremental social reform in Latin America have failed because privileged elites have been unwilling to accept even modest reform and a corresponding minimal redistribution of resources in favor of the grossly deprived and impoverished majority. The military regimes that have come to power to halt any further moves toward redistribution have viewed schooling essentially as a mechanism for social control and the maintenance and legitimization of inequality and special privilege.

Against this background of failure, I would like to examine a notable exception to rigidification and repression in Latin American society and education. This is the case of Cuba, where revolutionary efforts to create greater equality in economic and social relations during roughly the same years have required corresponding efforts to revolutionize education and turn it from what might be characterized as an egocentric consumer orientation to one seeking the creation of a "new man": i.e., youth who will be

selfless producers and fighters in the struggle for social reconstruction and economic development.

In this article, I would like to briefly examine how Cuban educational reform attempts have taken place, and how they have been related to social, economic, and political change efforts in the society at large. The basic question addressed might be stated as: under what conditions can Latin American educational

by Rolland G. Paulston

systems, with their still powerful colonial functions, be remade into mechanisms to support national goals of social equity, economic development, and the elimination of dependency? My intent here is not to hold up Cuba as an exemplary developmental model—the Cubans themselves will no doubt carry out this task—but rather to indicate something of the highly political nature of education and the close correspondence between educational change potentials and the dominant ideological and reward systems operating in any given society. I will examine in a general way how the Cuban educational change strategy has, on the one hand, come to grips with basic obstacles to educational development, and, on the other, completely altered relationships within the educational complex, as well as educational contributions to other sectors seeking to advance social and economic development.

CRITICAL DEFECTS IN PRE-REVOLUTIONARY EDUCATION

Given the near breakdown of Cuban society, the problems facing revolutionary educational reformers in 1959 appeared nearly insurmountable. Decades of political turmoil, graft, bureaucratic mismanagement, and the instability arising from the revolutionary war in the late 1950s all helped to produce one of Latin America's most inequitable and inefficient school systems. In most Latin American countries, the proportion of any school-age generation reaching each level of the school system slowly increases over the years. In contrast, the proportion of children receiving primary education in Cuba dropped markedly from the 1920s to the 1950s.

Perhaps the crucial deficiency of pre-revolutionary Cuban education lay in its orientation to professional training, and a near total rejection of practical, work-oriented skills required for national development. Graduates of law, the humanities, and the arts comprised the largest group among the economically active technical and professional population; in the mid-1950s, for example, agriculture, the nation's primary economic sector, employed less than one per cent of all professionals.

On taking power, Castro took pains to instruct all Cubans how inequities and inefficiencies in the educational system reflected the consequences of economic and cultural domination. His critique saw the essential function of Cuban education up to 1959 as one of replicating in the schools the social relations of production. This view, in what Samuel Bowles has called the "Correspondence Principle," relates education and economy in any society. As the social relations of schooling reproduce the social relations of production in each age group, the class structure is, in large part, also reproduced from one generation to the next. And when the division of labor results in a highly-stratified class structure dominated by foreign (largely U.S.) management, technical personnel, and ideological orientation as in pre-revolutionary Cuba, then we may well expect to find corresponding underdevelopment of a nation's educational institutions.

This, of course, is not to say that a small number of poor urban children, and even fewer rural youth, did not use schooling as a means to higher social status. By far the vast majority, however, attended schools for no more than four or five years. This provided time enough for children to learn the rudiments of numeracy and literacy on the one hand, and the stigma of their lower-class origins and their failure to succeed on the other. By colonizing the majority of Cuban youth to accept individual responsibility for school failure, and to accept economic and political relationships that favored the few, Cuban education functioned essentially to perpetuate and legitimize an oppressive status quo.

Let us now examine how recent Cuban efforts to build a new egalitarian society have called for parallel efforts to fundamentally alter the goals, programs, human relations, and outcomes of the educational system.

PRIORITIES AND PROGRAMS

When a group with radically different values comes to power in any society, they will attempt to implant their ideology or system of evaluative principles about the nature of reality. They will set new standards for social relations and bring these standards to bear on the programs of existing institutions. When possible, individuals who are for one reason or another unable or unwilling to accept the legitimacy of the new values and prescribed behaviors will seek to escape, as did many American Tories who fled to Canada after 1776, and many upper- and middle-class Cubans who fled to the U. S. after 1959.

During the first years of revolutionary social and economic reconstruction, the new government, accordingly, sought to equate the process of education with the process of revolution. Cuba would become, in Castro's words, "one big school," where radically-altered socio-economic relations would be supported and reinforced by massive educational efforts to teach Cubans of all ages the behaviors and skills necessary to insure the survival of the new dominant ideology. Castro's commitment to education as the critical element in efforts to create new social values is well illustrated in his remarks that: "We will make revolution if we really win the battle of education," and "Education is the country's most important task after having made the revolution, for it will create the ideological framework for the new generation." Thus, successful attainment of a new educational policy became a critical factor in the task of securing a revolutionary new status quo dedicated to egalitarian values and the development and distribution of national resources.

To what extent have Cubans actually been able to change the educational system? What programs have been developed to address the dual problems of reducing the educational deficit inherited from Batista's dictatorship, and implanting the "new system of values"?

With regard to the first task, the government mobilized hundreds of thousands of teachers, students, and other urban dwellers during 1959 and in the early 1960s to provide schools for all children in rural areas, to mount a national literacy campaign in 1961 for all adult illiterates, and to provide adult education follow-up courses for the newly literate. In 1961 alone, the government claimed a reduction of illiteracy among those over 14 years of age from about 21 per cent to only 3.9 per cent. Through this vast mobilization of volunteers, over one million Cubans of all ages participated either as teachers or new learners in a revolutionary educational experience of several months' duration. At the same time, elementary school enrollments shot up and the percentage of school-age youth enrolled in educational programs rose from about 58 per cent to over 90 per cent. The nonformal, or out-of-school, educational sector in like manner grew at an impressive rate with the creation of educational programs on the job, in the community, and in the large mass organizations representing small farmers, workers, youth, women, and other groups.

Regardless of the exact figure of new literates, the literacy campaign through mass mobilization and a massive input of resources accomplished in a period of less than one year what no other Latin American society has been able to do: carry out a successful national frontal-attack on chronic, widespread illiteracy. The largely rural campaign cost a good deal in time lost from work and school by the 271,000 volunteer teachers, and planning and administration often foundered. But more than literacy for 707,212 of Cuba's 985,000 illiterates resulted. Furthermore, many young Cubans who went to the countryside as teachers experienced for the first time the grim living conditions, the poverty, and the lack of opportunity in Cuba's most rural areas. With this experience, the campaign's slogan of "The People Should Teach the People" became a reality as Cubans from all classes and areas mixed as never before and began to understand themselves better, as well as to see in real life the revolution's causes and the legitimacy of its ambitious goals to eliminate exploitation and structured inequality.

After 1966, educational priorities shifted from the problems of equal access to educational opportunities

and programs to a more focused concern on "correct" ideological formation. Drawing heavily on the example and writings of Ernesto (Che) Guevara, schools received the charge to mold *"el hombre nuevo,"* a new socialist man whose deeds and accomplishments would make possible Castro's utopian call for a Marxist society in Cuba. Starting from the belief that human nature is not fixed but largely a product of social relations, Cuban educators now seek to form youth dedicated to self-sacrifice, to struggle against injustice and exploitation, to creative productivity, and to defense of the revolution and present regime. Efforts seeking these ends are, for example, currently underway in a plan to move most secondary schooling from cities into coeducational rural boarding schools where academic study is combined with productive labor in agriculture. Students are, accordingly, not only removed from the ego-enhancing temptations of city life and family, but placed in quasi-military settings, new living and learning contexts where the ideological formation and individual behavior can be closely observed and influenced with powerful new rewards and sanctions.

What then are the tangible accomplishments of Cuba's two-pronged educational attack on inherited educational problems, and its efforts to create a "new man"? A thorough assessment will, of course, only become possible when the Cuban government feels confident enough to permit research on the question in Cuba. Until that time, we have to depend largely on accounts of visiting scholars, on UNESCO data (Cuba is an active member), and on critiques of educational programs in the Cuban press. The following section will draw on these sources as well as from first-hand observations made by the writer during a three-week tour of Cuban educational programs in December 1970.

EVALUATION

In Cuba after 1959, powerful pressures have been brought to bear on every individual to develop a revolutionary awareness, to participate in mass organizations seeking individual and social change, and to contribute to national economic development largely by learning new needed skills and by volunteer labor. As the chosen instrument to accomplish these ends, education has been vastly expanded and reoriented both in the formal school system and in the out-of-school educational sector.

In the formal school system, elimination of private schools after 1961, vastly-increased budgetary inputs, along with community pressure and vigorous enforcement of extended attendance requirements, have all contributed to skyrocketing public school enrollment figures. Even in Cuba's most remote areas, i.e., the coastal swamps and eastern highlands, all children now have opportunities to attend local primary schools. But as schools remain rigidly test-oriented and authoritarian, wastage and grade-repeating rates are still high. Cuban educators today justify the continuing highly-selective nature of their school system on the need to build technical and leadership cadres capable of defending the revolution and maintaining its ideological purity.

Over a quarter of a million state fellowships, mostly for secondary school study in approved concentrations, have indeed opened opportunities for many poor rural and urban students to complete their schooling and bring sorely-needed technical skills into agriculture, industry, construction, and other sectors. Universities seek the dual priorities of ideological commitment and technological expertise. The law faculties have decreased and "careerism" is viewed as selfish and counter-revolutionary behavior. Rather, students are taught that new knowledge and skills must be used to advance social reform and development, and not be viewed—as in the old days—as private capital to be accumulated for individual or family gains of status and consumption.

In sum, the 15 years of revolutionary change in Cuban society have brought vast revisions in the values, programs, and outcomes of the school system. And as the revolution consolidates its gains, government expectations are that the new social and economic relations will be even more powerfully reflected in and continued through the socialization process in all aspects of daily life, and especially in schools. Although these new relationships are clearly evident in all school programs and settings, formal schools continue to be highly-selective authoritarian and ego-enhancing institutions, even while using new standards for socialistic "good behavior."

For youth and adults who for various reasons are viewed as *non-integrados,* or lacking integration in the revolutionary process, Cuban educational authorities have set up a vast nonformal, or parallel, educational sector enrolling nearly 400,000 students for largely on-the-job technical and indoctrination courses in the factories and fields, in work camps, in community centers, and in the mass organizations. These programs are often carried out with participation of the military and basically seek the same dual objectives as formal schools, but in more disciplined and work-related settings.

As the enormous educational deficit inherited from the previous regime has been eradicated with the building of a socialist nationwide learning system, educational policy in recent years has increasingly turned to the nagging problems of economic development. Attempts to raise production and to have such efforts viewed as the next revolutionary phase require that educational programs place greater emphasis on learning technical skills. If this shift from moral to technical learning priorities continues, it will be a powerful indicator of the degree to which Cuban authorities believe that the Cuban revolutionary ideology has been effectively implanted in new behaviors, in new norms, and in new social relations. For when revolutions succeed or achieve a new stage of equilibrium, routinization, and conservation, educational priorities also shift from learning revolutionary morality and the culture of the utopian goal to learning the new techniques used in maintaining that new culture.

CONCLUSIONS

Jose Marti, Cuba's poet-revolutionary, long ago set

the direction for educational change in his small Caribbean country with the exhortation that "One should learn in school to control the forces one has to grapple with in life. The word 'school' should be replaced by 'workshop.' " With a new national development strategy based on the concepts of equality, participation, and productivity, revolutionary Cuba has, for the first time in any Latin American country, created a social context where educational reform aspirations, work opportunities, and national development goals have been brought into a considerable degree of harmony.

Whether other Latin American countries will be able to draw upon this experience is, to say the least, highly problematic. An unusual combination of circumstances not likely to happen again facilitated Cuba's social revolution. A radically-altered value system has been developed and put into practice during the past decade with corresponding changes in individual behavior, social relations, and the operative system of rewards and sanctions.

When political groups seeking to pattern social and educational change on the Cuban model have failed to take complete power, as in Chile, Bolivia, or Uruguay, externally-supported repression has soon followed. Nor, on the other hand, is it sufficient for new elites, as in Peru, to dominate and intend to selectively adapt revolutionary educational programs. Recent Peruvian efforts to copy Cuban educational reform programs and approaches have, for example, largely failed because the schools cannot be radically changed within a relatively static social situation characterized by gross structured inequality. In Cuba, behaviors associated with the "new man" receive both moral and material rewards in the school, in the work place, and in the community. In Peru, however, exhortations for self-sacrifice and service to the community pronounced in the classroom or workshop are largely viewed as naive nonsense, as another bureaucratic ploy, in the larger, unreformed society. In Cuba, young volunteers are treated as heroes; in Peru, they are most often characterized as *"tontos utiles,"* useful fools.

Thus, Peru's attempt to create "a new Peruvian man" through selectively drawing on Cuban educational change examples for school reform, but in a largely unreformed class society, is unlikely to meet the military junta's expectations. To the extent that the "Correspondence Principle" is valid, formal schools can never serve as centers for the dissemination of radical change into the larger society. Quite the contrary, only when a new value system has come to power will schools undergo rapid and profound change so as to reflect altered priorities and social relations. PM

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